metro

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Wednesday, January 11, 2017 metro.us | t: MetroPhilly | f: MetroPhilly

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Philadelphia activists march into Sen. Pat Toomey's district offices every Tuesday to voice concerns. 4

ALEXIS SACHDEV

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US JURY CONDEMNS DYLANN ROOF TO DEATH

1 A jury condemned white supremacist Dylann Roof to death for the hate-fueled killings of nine black parishioners at a Bible study meeting in a Charleston, South Carolina, church in 2015. The same jury last month found Roof, 22, guilty of 33 federal charges, including hate crimes resulting in death, for the shootings at the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church. Jurors deliberated for less than three hours. Roof stared straight ahead as the judge read through the jury's verdict findings before announcing his death sentence. Roof was unrepentant during his closing argument earlier in the day. He told jurors he felt the massacre was something he had to do and did not ask that his life be spared. REUTERS

CREDIT CARD OR CASH: SURCHARGE LAW DISPUTE

2 The U.S. Supreme Court on Tuesday struggled over how to decide a challenge to a New York state law barring retailers from imposing surcharges on customers who make purchases with a credit card instead of cash. The eight justices seemed divided over whether the state's law is a form of speech regulation and, even if it is, whether it is an unlawful restriction.

Merchants have argued that New York's law and similar ones in other states violate retailers' rights to free speech and due process under the U.S. Constitution. The court heard a one-hour argument in an appeal filed by a group of merchants to a 2015 ruling by the New York-based 2nd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals that upheld the law. Nine other states have similar laws. REUTERS

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ERIN TIERNAN, WEB PRODUCER

Family arguments over who gets to be the Scotty dog in Monopoly could be a thing of the past. Hasbro is running a contest now through Jan. 31 giving fans a chance to weigh in on which eight tokens will accompany the game. Just think, you could be a T. rex instead of a thimble! Check out the other options: **metro.us/viral** or **metro.us/lifestyle.**

PROTESTS ON THE HILL

5 A protester shouts, "No Trump, No KKK, No facist USA" as he is hauled out of the Senate Judiciary Committee's confirmation hearing for Sen. Jeff Sessions (R-AL) to be the next U.S. attorney general in the Russell Senate Office Building on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C., on Tuesday. Sessions was one of the first members of Congress to endorse and support President-elect Donald Trump, who nominated him for attorney general.

5 THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW

GETTY IMAGES

FIFA AGREES TO EXPAND WORLD CUP TO 48 TEAMS

3 Soccer's governing body, FIFA, voted to expand the World Cup to 48 teams from its current 32, brushing aside concerns that the expansion would lower the overall standard of the tournament and make it too big and unwieldy. FIFA president Gianni Infantino, fulfilling a promise he made during last year's election campaign, said the move meant that "more can participate and many more will have a chance to dream."

"It's not the 20th century any more. It's the 21st century. Football is more than Europe and South America. Football is global," he told reporters. "The football fever you have in a country that qualifies for the World Cup is the biggest promotion of the sport you can have." REUTERS

WAL-MART PLANS JOB CUTS THIS MONTH

4 Wal-Mart Stores Inc. plans to cut hundreds of jobs before the end of January, the Wall Street Journal reported, citing people familiar with the situation. The Bentonville, Arkansas-based retailer plans to eliminate jobs at its headquarters and regional personnel that support stores, according to the report. Many of the eliminations will affect Wal-Mart's human resources department, a large team that some senior executives believe should be more efficient or whose duties could be handled by outside consultants, the newspaper reported. Other departments could be affected as well, the report said. "While we continually look at our corporate structure, we have not made any announcements," Wal-Mart spokesman Randy Hargrove said in an email. REUTERS

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Philadelphia activists demand action on 'Tuesdays with Toomey'

Groups of Pennsylvanians march to Sen. Pat Toomey's district offices every Tuesday to voice their concerns.

ALEXIS SACHDEV
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Vashti Bandy addresses a crowd at Tuesday's gathering outside Sen. Pat Toomey's Center City office. ALEXIS SACHDEV

Opposing Sessions matters because...
A Racist should NOT BE IN CHARGE OF ENFORCING THE VOTING RIGHTS ACT
#TUESDAYSWITHTOOMEY

Struggling to project her voice over persistent taxi horns and far-off sirens blaring through Center City, Sarah Roberts kept the megaphone close to her mouth.

Perhaps it was her nerves — this was Roberts' first time addressing a crowd through a bullhorn — or maybe the biting cold weather that left the audience straining to hear her words.

The petite 31-year-old, in an oversized magenta beanie, nonetheless was sending a powerful message to conservatives, and using their ammunition against them.

"Leviticus — which I know [Sen. Jeff Sessions] must love because he is really fond of using it to say gay people like me don't deserve God's love," Roberts said through the megaphone. "Leviticus also says, 'When a foreigner resides among you in your land, do not mistreat them. The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt.'"

It was the seventh week that a crowd had gathered outside Pennsylvania Sen. Pat Toomey's Philadelphia outpost. Branded #TuesdaysWithToomey, constituents came en masse to send their senator a message. This week, they were urging the recently re-elected official to oppose Sessions' nomination for attorney general.

Roberts, an Alabama transplant, has much in common with the controversial Republican: They hail from the same Southern state; they were both raised in Methodist churches; and they both use Scripture to guide their political beliefs.

"In case anyone — Jeff Sessions, Pat Toomey — is confused, this means do not ban Muslims or Latinos from America, or treat them as second-class citizens," Roberts continued amid cheers from the crowd. "And it does not mean that black children in America should have bad schools, and white people in America have good schools."

Tuesdays with Toomey has now spread across the state, with events every week in Allentown, Johnstown and Pittsburgh. Initial gatherings in Philadelphia consisted of a band of hardly 10 protestors. This week, organizers expected 150, and saw a turnout that neared 100.

Vashti Bandy joined in its second week, and now organizes communications for Tuesdays with Toomey. In a letter to the editor published with NewsWorks, Bandy used the one-year anniversary of David Bowie's death to urge people to be heroes for civil rights — "if just for one day."

Not surprisingly, social justice is in her blood. Bandy's grandmother, a Macon, Georgia, native, marched with Martin Luther King Jr. before relocating her family to Philly, fleeing a Ku Klux Klan lynch mob. She died shortly before President Barack Obama won his first term.

"If she was still here, she'd be fighting like hell," Bandy said.

That responsibility now rests with Bandy, who's vowed to stand outside Toomey's office every Tuesday for the next six years, each week armed with a different issue.

> *"We want him to work for us, and we want him to listen to us."*
> Vashti Bandy

Toomey's office is less predictable. In early gatherings, staffers invited the group up to their office, and facilitated discussion. But last week, activists were locked out of Eight Penn Center, the high-rise that houses Toomey's 17th-floor office. According to Bandy, Toomey's office was closed that afternoon and staffers didn't accept letters activists had written.

"Last week, Sen. Toomey's staff was committed elsewhere at that time," press secretary Steve Kelly told Metro in an email. "Staff notified the group of the situation in advance and offered a meeting at another time."

Kelly also said Toomey's staff has met with the Tuesdays with Toomey group several times in recent months, and said they are happy to continue doing so, "as issues warrant." The senator, Kelly added, is in Washington during the gatherings.

This week, a Philadelphia Police Department civil affairs officer facilitated the exchange of more than 50 letters to Toomey's camp. But again, the crowd was locked out of the building.

Bandy, a diligent caller to Toomey's eight offices, doesn't want just a standard response — not like she's received one yet. She and many others who gather at the senator's Center City office are demanding more.

"We want him to work for us, and we want him to listen to us," Bandy said.

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PHILADELPHIA EYE ASSOCIATES

The Philadelphia Writers Resist logo shows a writer's hand holding a pen wrapped around the Liberty Bell. COURTESY OF COLLEEN HAMMOND

Philly writers join organizing efforts to 'resist' Trump

They'll unite at the birthplace of the First Amendment.

SAM NEWHOUSE
@scnewhouse
sam.newhouse@metro.us

His presidency is a week away, but when Donald Trump walks into the White House, an avalanche of social justice advocates and activists will already be organized to oppose him.

Now, a somewhat quieter group is throwing their efforts into the coalitions against Trump: the writers of Philadelphia.

"Writers are the ultimate witnesses," said Nathaniel Popkin, a local writer and novelist, who is helping to organize "Philadelphia Writers Resist," a gathering scheduled for Sunday. "We had better start speaking up."

Writers Resist is an international movement founded by PEN America, and writers will be joining together in cities across the country on Sunday to speak up for "the First Amendment, for dignity and truth" under a presidency that some fear could erode the right to free speech, Popkin said.

"Writers write the text that transforms thoughts and idea and vision into reality," he said. "Traditionally, in every society, writers have stepped forward as beacons of progressive ideas. That's what is happening now. There's an awakening. Writers feel a responsibility because their life exists in public, to take a stand."

More than 35 writers will read texts for the public at the Philly event on Sunday, including famed Philadelphia "freedom texts." Participants will include former Philly Poet Laureate Frank Sherlock, Philebrity.com founder Joey Sweeney, and Nic Esposito, an urban farmer and founder of Head and the Hand publishing press who is also director of Philly's new Zero Waste and Litter Cabinet.

"As writers, we use words and language to help us arrive as close to the truth as possible," said poet Alicia Askenase, who is organizing the event along with Popkin and fellow writer Stephanie Feldman. "Now, as we listen and read as these words are abused and manipulated to the point of the loss of the ability to discern what a fact or the truth is, [it feels] profoundly disorienting and dangerous."

Askenase said Trump appears to be someone who "doesn't seem to know or care about the difference between a lie and the truth."

"That many others seem to not care either, and enjoy his behavior, is also disturbing," she added.

Making the intervention of writers even more important, Askenase and Popkin said, is how Trump as president will influence the nation's shared narrative.

"My biggest area of concern is the disruption and distortion to true and valid reporting through fake news, and even worse, the mouth of our president-elect," Askenase said.

Will Trump really curtail the right to free speech and fair journalism? Popkin acknowledged it's too early to tell, but pointed to Trump's repeated threats and insults toward opponents as evidence of how he will lead.

"The guy threatens people," Popkin said. "I don't see why we should imagine that First Amendment rights would not be threatened. It could start subtly. But the man threatens writers and editors all the time. How can that not have an effect?"

Philadelphia Writers Resist

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Why Viagra Is Failing Men

Soaring demand expected for new scientific advance made just for older men. Works on both men's physical ability and their desire in bed.

By Harlan S. Waxman
Health News Syndicate

New York – If you're like the rest of us guys over 50; you probably already know the truth… Prescription ED pills don't work! Simply getting an erection doesn't fix the problem" says Dr. Bassam Damaj, chief scientific officer at the world famous Innovus Pharma Laboratories.

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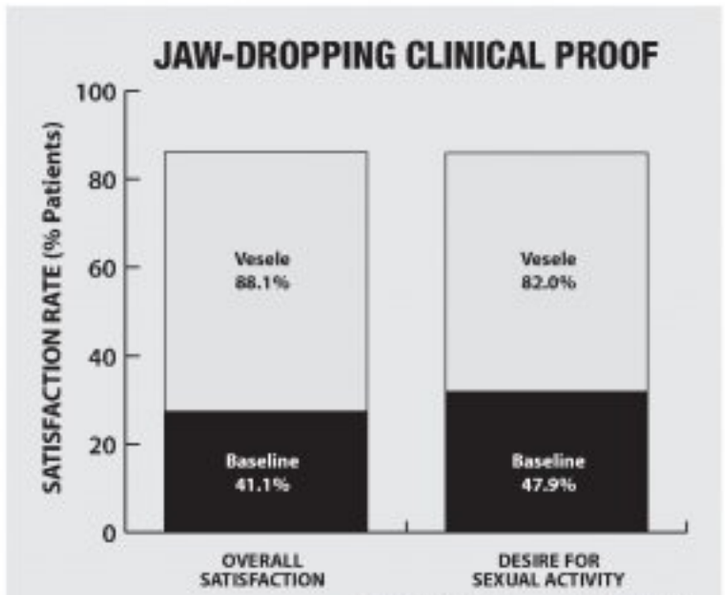

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BRIEF

Trump's nominee for attorney general says he can stand up to him

Donald Trump's choice for attorney general promised on Tuesday to stand up to Trump, his close ally and future boss, saying he would oppose a ban on Muslims entering the country and enforce a law against waterboarding even though he voted against the law.

Questioned by a U.S. Senate committee tasked with confirming his appointment, Sen. Jeff Sessions distanced himself from comments he had made defending Trump from criticism over a 2005 video that emerged in October showing Trump boasting about grabbing women's genitals.

At the time Sessions told The Weekly Standard magazine he would not characterize the behavior as sexual assault. He later said the comments were taken out of context. Asked on Tuesday whether "grabbing a woman by her genitals without consent is ... sexual assault," he replied, "Clearly, it would be."

With 10 days to go before Trump enters the White House, Sessions, 70, was the first of his Cabinet nominees to go before a Senate committee.

As attorney general, Sessions will serve as the top U.S. federal prosecutor and be responsible for giving unbiased legal advice to the president and executive agencies.

With that in mind, lawmakers from both Trump's Republican Party and the rival Democratic Party sought to establish how closely Sessions hewed to Trump positions and whether he could put aside his staunchly conservative political positions to enforce laws he may personally oppose.

A senator since 1997, Sessions was widely expected to be confirmed by the Republican-controlled Senate. REUTERS

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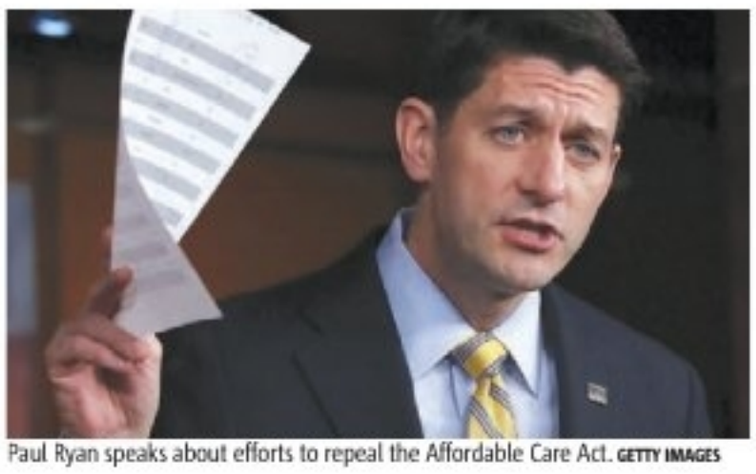
Trump tells Republicans to pass Obamacare replacement 'very quickly'



Paul Ryan speaks about efforts to repeal the Affordable Care Act. GETTY IMAGES

In an interview with the New York Times, Trump said he wanted a substitute for President Barack Obama's health-care law done "very quickly or simultaneously" to the vote to get rid of it.

Donald Trump on Tuesday put renewed pressure on congressional Republicans working to repeal Obamacare, insisting that lawmakers pass a replacement for the health-care law at the same time or soon after they vote to dismantle it.

With Trump preparing to succeed Obama on Jan. 20, Republicans, who control both chambers of Congress, face a dilemma.

They have a chance to make good on their promise to gut the 2010 health-care law known as Obamacare and have taken some initial steps to clear the decks for such action.

But reaching agreement among Republicans for replacement legislation likely will prove harder than passing a repeal. If Republicans are unable to put in place a substitute, millions of Americans who receive health care under Obamacare may be at risk of losing coverage.

The law extended insurance coverage to uninsured Americans by expanding the Medicaid program for the poor and creating online exchanges where consumers can shop for private health insurance plans. The law also provides for subsidies to help individuals and families afford coverage purchased on the exchanges.

House of Representatives Speaker Paul Ryan said on Tuesday that some elements of an insurance substitute likely would be ready when lawmakers vote to repeal Obamacare, but other aspects would take longer. Some Republican lawmakers have said it could take up to two years to come up with a replacement.

Trump said in the New York Times interview that a delay of that length was unacceptable.

"It won't be repeal and then two years later go in with another plan," he said, according to the paper.

Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell said on Tuesday that Trump's comments were "not inconsistent" with lawmakers' plans.

The Senate is expected to vote this week on a budget measure that would direct committees to draft Obamacare repeal legislation shortly. If the measure passes the Senate, it would go to the House for a vote, probably on Friday, House Republican aides said. REUTERS

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US companies have new business risk — Trump labeling them as 'anti-American'

Trump campaigned on an "America First" anti-globalization platform that promised the return of thousands of U.S. manufacturing jobs to economically depressed areas.

Companies are beefing up their Twitter monitoring for any Trump tweets that could affect them. GETTY IMAGES

"You never want to be against the president — especially not one as vocal as [Trump]."

A Fortune 500 CEO

Some U.S. companies are reviewing potential mergers while others are rethinking job cuts or looking at their manufacturing operations in China for fear of being cast as "anti-American" by President-elect Donald Trump, according to Wall Street bankers, company executives and crisis management consultants.

Having seen some of America's largest companies, including General Motors Co., Lockheed Martin Corp. and United Technologies Corp., bluntly and publicly rebuked by Trump on Twitter, many others are worried they may be his next target — especially if they have significant overseas manufacturing, have had U.S. job cuts or price increases for consumers.

"Any business that leaves our country for another country, fires its employees, builds a new factory or plant in the other country, and then thinks it will sell its product back into the U.S. without retribution or consequence is WRONG!" Trump, who assumes office on Jan. 20, tweeted in December.

That nationalist rhetoric and Trump's willingness to use his Twitter account as a cudgel has so rattled some companies that they are putting on hold mergers and acquisitions that may involve significant job cuts or moving production or tax domicile abroad, out of fear that such deals could be seen as "unpatriotic," several top Wall Street bankers said.

Bermuda-based White Mountains Insurance Group Ltd. had been in talks to sell itself in a transaction that would have been structured as an inversion — where a U.S.-based buyer would move its tax domicile overseas.

However, the deal fell apart after the November election partly because potential buyers worried that leaving the U.S. tax home would be seen as "anti-American," three people with knowledge of the matter said. Potential buyers also found the target less attractive because of the likelihood of lower U.S. corporate taxes under the Trump administration, the people said.

Representatives of the $3.8 billion company declined to comment.

At least two other insurance deals have also fallen apart since the election for similar reasons, said the people, who declined to elaborate and asked not to be named because the matter is not public.

Trump's aggressive anti-China rhetoric has also given some companies pause. REUTERS

DEFENDING RIGHTS OF INJURED VICTIMS

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Obama says Israeli settlements are making two-state solution impossible

Israel captured the West Bank and East Jerusalem in the 1967 Middle East war. It later annexed East Jerusalem in a move not recognized internationally.

A Palestinian works on a construction site in the Israeli settlement of Efrat situated on the southern outskirts of the West Bank city of Bethlehem. GETTY IMAGES

President Barack Obama, in an interview aired on Israeli television on Tuesday, said Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's policy backing settlements in occupied territory is making a future Palestinian state impossible.

"Bibi says that he believes in the two-state solution and yet his actions consistently have shown that if he is getting pressured to approve more settlements he will do so regardless of what he says about the importance of the two-state solution," Obama said, referring to Netanyahu by his nickname.

Some 570,000 Israelis now live in the Israeli-occupied West Bank and in East Jerusalem, together home to more than 2.6 million Palestinians.

Obama, who leaves office on Jan. 20, said that in the past few years both he and Secretary of State John Kerry had "countless times" personally appealed to Netanyahu to stop settlement activity, but that those pleas were ignored.

"Increasingly what you are seeing is that the facts on the ground are making it almost impossible, at least very difficult, and if this trendline continues — impossible, to create a contiguous, functioning Palestinian state," Obama told Channel Two's "Uvda" program.

Israel expects to receive more favorable treatment from Obama's successor, President-elect Donald Trump.

Trump has denounced the Obama administration's Israel policy and has vowed to move the U.S. Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, riling the Palestinians. He has also named as U.S. ambassador to Israel a lawyer who raised money for a major Jewish settlement.

Relations between Netanyahu and Obama have been strained for years over their differences regarding settlement-building and Iran's nuclear deal with world powers signed in 2015.

Ties deteriorated to a low point in December when Washington did not exercise its veto to stop a U.N. Security Council resolution that demands an end to Israeli settlement building, prompting harsh criticism from Netanyahu of Obama and Kerry.

The right-wing Netanyahu has accused the Obama administration of being obsessed with settlements and not recognizing what he called "the root of the conflict — Palestinian opposition to a Jewish state in any boundaries."

Netanyahu, for whom settlers are a key constituency, has said his government has been their greatest ally. The Palestinians want the West Bank and East Jerusalem, along with the Gaza Strip — which Israel also captured in 1967 but withdrew from in 2005 — for an independent state. REUTERS

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Scientists find clues to why binge-drinking causes binge-eating

Scientists have found that the brain cells in mice that stimulate the urge to eat can be activated by alcohol as well as by hunger — a discovery that could help explain why binge drinking often leads to binge eating.

In an experiment, mice subjected to a three-day "alcoholic weekend" were found to eat significantly more food than mice that stayed sober.

The results, published in the journal Nature Communications on Tuesday, show that major components of the brain's feeding circuits are activated by alcohol, the researchers said.

"Our data suggest that alcohol sustains fundamental appetite signals, [and does] not just disinhibit their behavioral manifestation," wrote Dennis Burdakov, who led the study at the Francis Crick Institute in London.

Consumption of alcohol has previously been linked to overeating in humans, but the underlying causes were unclear — particularly since alcohol is high in calories, and calorie intake usually suppresses brain appetite signals.

Burdakov said his study found that specific hunger-promoting brain cells known as AgRP neurons, which form part of the feeding circuit in mouse brains, are activated by alcohol.

To test the validity of their findings, Burdakov's team were able to block activity of these neurons in some mice, and they found that this eliminated alcohol-induced overeating.

Obesity and heavy drinking causes major health risks. GETTY IMAGES

This shows, they said, "that the alcohol-associated activity of AgRP neurons … is the critical step in alcohol-induced overeating."

Obesity and heavy drinking are major causes of heart disease, diabetes and other chronic health problems affecting millions of people worldwide. REUTERS

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Kim Kardashian robbery was likely an inside job

New evidence is in, and it suggests that Kim Kardashian's traumatic Paris heist was an inside job. On Monday, 17 suspects were arrested in connection with the robbery, including a limo driver who was the last person to have chauffeured Kardashian on the night of the incident.

According to People, French police believe he may have supplied the robbers with information on the reality star's whereabouts. The suspects include a 72-year-old man identified as "Pierre B," who is said to have organized the robbery, according to French police reports.

Kardashian, who is reportedly very happy with the progress of the investigation, celebrated the news with a night out at Shu Sushi with husband Kanye West in tow. The recently reclusive pair looked more like themselves than ever, with Kardashian dressed down in deconstructed lacy denim, and Kanye wearing a cozy, luxurious sweatsuit. We're guessing much like time, sushi heals all wounds.

Aly Raisman And Simone Biles in the Sports Illustrated Swimsuit issue

BOTH JAMES MACRAI/SPORTS ILLUSTRATED

Sports Illustrated's Swimsuit Issue just keeps getting better and better.

Everyone's favorite Olympic gymnasts, Aly Raisman and Simone Biles, are trading in their leotards for bikinis as part of SI's 2017 Swimsuit issue. And guess what: They look stunning.

"Aly and Simone represent all that is beautiful and strong and inspiring in women today," says SI Swimsuit Editor MJ Day. "These women, their beauty and what they can achieve, know no limits."

the word

RACHAEL CLEMMONS

Are Brad Pitt and Kate Hudson dating?

Brad Pitt is slowly but surely making his way back into the spotlight. The actor — looking really, really good, frankly — made a rare appearance at the Golden Globes on Sunday, to lots of cheers and applause from his fellow A-listers. But that's not all.

The powerhouse formerly known as Brangelina released a joint statement late Monday evening promising to keep the details of their divorce on the hush and out of the public eye. According to an exclusive statement obtained by People, Pitt and Angelina Jolie are "committed to act as a united front to effectuate recovery and reunification," which sounds like a fancy way to remind us all to mind our business while they put their family first.

Meanwhile, the very handsome actor (seriously, he looked so good) has been rumored to be hooking up with actress Kate Hudson. Between producing award winning movies and getting divorced in front of the whole world, where does he find the time?

Chris Brown and Soulja Boy are taking their beef to Dubai

Another day, another drawn out Twitter & Instagram beef between two celebrities that should know better.Soulja Boy finally got what he wanted— Chris Brown is ready to meet him in the boxing ring. And what's more, the two are allegedly taking it all the way to Dubai.

That's right. In a bid to fill their pockets and, I don't know, wring the most attention out of this absurd turn of events, the two petulant man-children are planning a fight overseas. TMZ reports they genuinely want to punch the crap out of each other because they genuinely don't like each other. You guys! Duke it out or shut up. Or, like, fade into obscurity. Whatever works.

Chris Brown is being trained by Mike Tyson while Soulja Boy is being trained by Floyd Mayweather, and all four of these grown men sure have a lot of time on their hands.

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Fred Armisen of 'Portlandia' thinks it's

The hunks have officially taken over.

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You would think by its seventh season, "Portlandia" would start losing steam — but it hasn't. The quirky sketch comedy series follows the lovable yet eccentric characters who "keep Portland weird," with Fred Armisen and Carrie Brownstein playing most of them. From the feminist-bookstore owners to the gothic oddballs to ultra-bohemian couples, "Portlandia" is a patchwork of relatability and quality laughs. We got to chat with one of its creators and stars, Fred Armisen, about hunks taking over, why Trump isn't touched on this season and the possibility of a "Portlandia" album.

How does it feel to be in Season 7?

It's the best. I love doing "Portlandia." We learn more and more every year. We get better at it. I can't believe my luck. To be going this long — I think of it as my new job still. I'm very fortunate.

Each episode moves so fast and the sketches are chock full of great characters. What is the writing process for a show like this?

Maybe two months? We have the writer's room. We work really hard on it. We make sure that it has some relevance, that it's fun — a million things put together so we're all happy. It's the opposite of lazy. We work long hours to make sure it has a shelf life. We've got a good group.

Ever since the "Song for Portland" episode, I keep wondering if you guys will ever do a "Portlandia" album, with you and Carrie and all of the guest stars. Any chance of that ever happening?

In Season 7, Carrie dates a hunk and the nerds don't like it. AUGUSTA QUIRK

That's a really great idea. My answer is yes. I think that would be really cool. Ideas like that are so good. It's actually getting it together that takes a bit of work. But I think it would be worth it.

A lot of comedy shows are being pretty direct about their disapproval of Donald Trump right now. However, in the episodes I've seen so far in this season, it's a subject you don't touch on. Any reason for that?

We don't have the luxury of being a nightly or weekly TV show. We shoot in the summer. We started writing last year in May. Because it takes so long, we can't afford to get specific. With ours, we need to keep it vague.

The "What About Men?" sketch really made me think of Trump supporters — white men out there who feel like their voices aren't being heard. But then there's the hunks bit. You really think hunks are taking over in our culture?

They already took over! [Laughs] There was a time when hunks were dumdums, and now they have a sense of humor. They're smart, they're comedians, they do it all and they're so accepted now. They're taking the thunder away from the nerds, and nerds are jealous of that.

What can nerds do?

We need a "What About Nerds?" sketch. They're disappearing. They became so difficult that now they don't get to be heard at all. There are so many subgenres [like gaming] and they're disappearing into them.

You've played so many characters on this show. Do you have a favorite?

I always relate to the weirdo goth characters.

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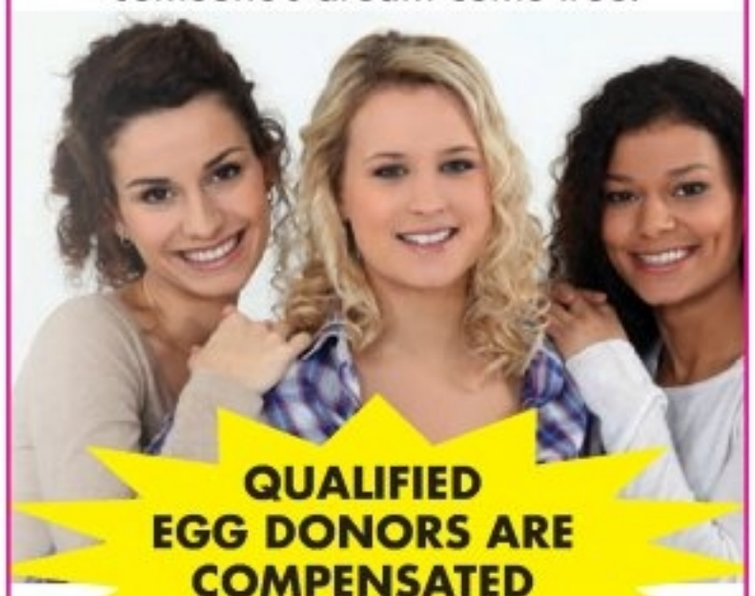

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over for the nerds

I don't know why. I love doing them. I wish I could do a whole show with just them.

What do you do when you're not working on "Portlandia?"
Working on other shows. I never have a day off — ever. I just keep going.

Do you have any advice for people out there getting their start in comedy?
If they're already doing things on YouTube, they're already on the right path and doing the right things. That's the first step. You're already in great shape. There's plenty of time. My advice is to always surround yourself with people who make you laugh and most likely you're making them laugh too. Because then your whole experience all the way through is a fun experience so at least you're enjoying all of that time.

Fred Armisen GETTY IMAGES

On that note, what's it like working with Carrie all these years?
She's my best friend in the whole world. That is the luckiest thing of my whole life. That is the best thing — everything I love combined that I get to hang out with her and work with her. I don't know what I could have done in a past life to have deserved such a great experience but it really is on many levels the greatest thing.

The next new episode of "Portlandia" airs this Thursday, Jan. 12 at 10 p.m. on IFC.

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Who doesn't want to make their dream tree house a reality?

Whether it's a fantasy getaway or something simple for the kids, Tree Top Builders has seen it all since they started in 2003. The company, based in West Chester, plans to show off their unique product at the Philly Home show Jan. 13-16 and Jan. 20-22.

"We don't have any competitors with our experience," says owner Dan Wright. "There isn't anyone else on the East Coast who has built 400 tree houses."

They have built tree houses and structures in trees for both residential and commercial use throughout the Philadelphia region. From simple structures to guest houses complete with kitchens and bathrooms, Wright and his team create intricate designs for their projects. The custom tree houses vary in price depending on size, amenities and other factors, with smaller backyard tree houses usually start at $7,000.

Although Wright and his employees have completed many different projects over the years,

home

LOVE WHERE YOU LIVE

there are some dream tree houses that they've designed without a customer to build it for. That's when Wright decided to open up a tree house theme park.

"We wanted to build the park to show some amazing things," says Wright.

Although the park opened in 2014, Wright and his team are still expanding it to include activities for both children and adults. An exciting new addition to the park is a large zip line, which will open in March.

In addition to showcasing their custom tree houses and the theme park, Tree Top Builders will also be at the Philly Home Show to talk about tools and resources for people who want to start their own tree house project. The company also hosts biannual workshops for the more hands-on tree house enthusiasts. Even if it's just to spread the word, Wright is ready to talk to Philly Home Show attendees about making their tree house dreams come true.

"This tends to get people excited because it's something they haven't heard of before," said Wright. "I expect some people will plan to buy a tree house, some will book a birthday party [at Tree Top World] or people are going to ask about how to get started with their own project. Anything to do with tree houses, I think the Home Show is going to help us get that message out."

The Philly Home Show takes place at the Pennsylvania Convention Center Jan. 13-16 and Jan. 20-22. Tickets are $10 in advance and $13 at the Convention Center box office.

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What's on Eagles' offseason radar?

The offseason will force the Eagles to answer some important questions.

LUKE MILLER
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Carson Wentz and Doug Pederson both had ups and downs during their rookie year. GETTY IMAGES

The 2016 Eagles left a lot of different impressions. Not many expected a playoff team and after Sam Bradford was traded the week before the season, not many would have even expected 7-9. Carson Wentz had only thrown 24 passes in one preseason game.

But after a 3-0 start that culminated in a 34-3 thrashing of the Super Bowl contender Steelers, expectations changed. From Week 5 through Week 15 the Eagles went 2-9 while the Cowboys and Giants went a combined 19-3, putting the division well out of reach and causing each game to approach with a general feeling of morbidity.

Then the Eagles finished the season by beating the Giants' starters and the Cowboys' backups, and now no one is quite sure what to think.

The NFC East, no longer a collection of mediocre, directionless teams where the first to 9-7 takes the division, is now headed by a behemoth with rookie stars at quarterback and running back and the best offensive line in football, what looks like the beginning of a dynasty.

Here are some of our biggest concerns as the offseason commenses:

This year's rookies

The biggest change will always be Wentz. The great unknown that shaped the 2016 offseason is, for all intents and purposes, now a known. Wentz started on fire, struggled with the rest of the team in mid-season, but rebounded with a finish that left few in doubt the Eagles struck gold with their draft gamble.

The jury is still out on Doug Pederson, but he navigated a rookie year that included the Bradford trade, Josh Huff escapade and mid-season slump without losing the team, as evidenced by their closing victories. There is reason to be optimistic.

Drafting wide receivers

A year ago, many fans would have been watching Clemson in the national championship with visions of Deshaun Watson in midnight green dancing through their heads like the Alabama defense. That's obviously not to be, but if you paid attention to the other end of Watson's passes Monday night, you'd notice many of them being reeled in almost cartoonishly by Mike Williams, whom you can feel free to dream about wearing midnight (or kelly, please) green.

Williams and Western Michigan's Corey Davis are two of the best prospects at wide receiver in this draft class and the Eagles still need a wide receiver, or three. The lack of progress and production by youngsters Nelson Agholor, Dorial Green-Beckham and, before his release, Josh Huff, most recently resulted in Greg Lewis losing his job as wide receivers coach. Alshon Jeffery, Kenny Stills and DeSean Jackson are the veteran names that dominate the conversation.

Drafting cornerbacks

On defense, cornerback is another unfortunately unchanged story. Despite at least average safety play, Pro Football Focus ranked the Eagles secondary 32nd (or, in layman's terms: last) in the NFL in 2016 due to the play of the corners. Jalen Mills was a seventh-round rookie moving to the position from safety and asked to cover the NFL's best receivers. He survived, and can be excused. For Jim Schwartz favorite Leodis McKelvin and Nolan Carroll, who led the NFL in pass interference penalties, it's less easy to advocate their return.

It's also less easy to replace them. The Eagles may be well wary of shopping for a cornerback in free agency after being burned on Nnamdi Asomugha and Maxwell. That means corner will compete with receiver and running back for attention on draft day. The good news is that the corner class in 2016 is deep and talent rich and more than one first-round prospect is almost guaranteed to slip into the second day.

Konecny scared straight after healthy scratch

Keeping up with Flyers By Kyle Phillippi Konecny

Travis Konecny found himself where no player ever wants to be: watching his teammates on the ice from up in the press box.

Designated as a healthy scratch on Dec. 30 due to a lack of goal scoring, Konecny could only sit and watch the game with San Jose and mentally prepare himself for whenever he got back out there. His absence wouldn't extend past the one game, though, as the rookie found himself in the lineup the following contest. Since that brief demotion, Konecny has been one of the team's better forwards.

"I came back from Christmas break with a shooting mentality and a positive outlook, just make sure I get pucks on net," Konecny said after the 4-2 win over Tampa Bay on Saturday. "If you're not shooting you're not gonna score."

In four games since his benching, the 19-year-old has a pair of goals. Prior to that, he hadn't scored in 22 consecutive games. The biggest change as of late has been the reunion of the Jake Voracek, Sean Couturier and Konecny line, the same trio that began the season and continued on as the team's most productive line through the early going. It's a move that paid off in a weekend that saw the Flyers take three out of a possible four points.

Travis Konecny, after a mid-season slump, looks to be back on track. GETTY IMAGES

"We know how to play with each other," Konecny said. "We had about 20 games or so playing with each other and we create good offense. I've been saying all along we support each other, we complement each other really well and I think it's just a little change up that happens in hockey and it worked for us."

There's still some doubt as to whether he's being utilized to his full potential, particularly in the speed-oriented 3-on-3 overtime where he's only played a total of 4:14 compared to forwards like Pierre-Edouard Bellemare who has seen 8:40 of ice time. Yet, Konecny remains in the top 10 in a loaded rookie class in scoring with 20 points on six goals and 14 assists.

The Flyers are hoping that the second half of the season for Konecny sees him making even more plays than he had in an up-and-down first half.

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4029 Johnson, Bridget L HH, F, C • 5039 Leach, Aisha HH, F, C • 5054 Miller, Curtis HH, F • 4001 Owens, Bernard HH
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Across
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5 Piece of bread
10 Spy -- Hari
14 End of a CSA signature (2 wds.)
15 Mystiques
16 Welsh form of "John"
17 Frankfurt's river
18 Burro alternative
19 Calcium source
20 Sci-fi tunnels
22 Prepare eggs
23 "-- -- Woman" (Helen Reddy)
24 102, to a centurion
25 Varmint
29 Go faster
33 Flood barrier
34 Buffalo's lake
36 Auction shout
37 -- -- nutshell
38 Mountain -- (perennial herb)
39 Sleazy newspaper
40 Cafe handout
42 Zwieback
43 Couric of "Today"
45 Burns' mouse
47 First American in space
49 "2001" computer
50 Half of deux
51 Peeved
54 Creamy-petaled flowers
60 Treasured
61 Drop by
62 While away
63 La femme
64 Hunger for
65 Shaq's teammate
66 Gave the once-over
67 Snagged a dogie
68 Zest for life

Down
1 Kitty's greeting
2 Tough-guy actor -- Ray
3 Knowing look
4 Home wrecker?
5 Seven-veil dancer
6 Quiet spell
7 Latin hymn word
8 Engine parts
9 That senora
10 Ghosts often work on them
11 Reebok rival
12 Chalky mineral
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21 Detest
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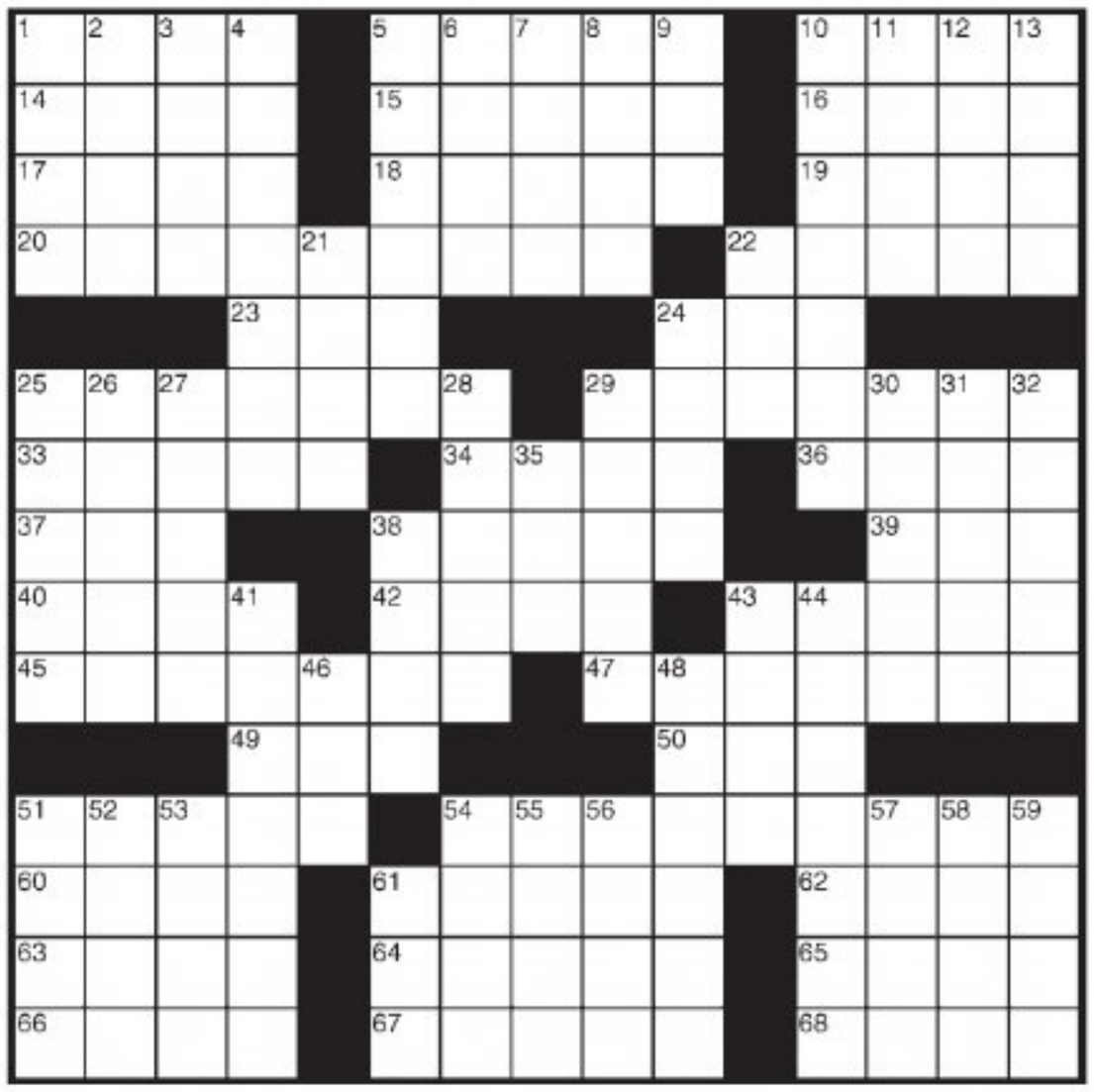
30 Major artery
31 "-- de Lune"
32 Crept
35 Home, in the phone book
38 Seed covering
41 Led down the aisle
43 Casino game
44 Hulking
46 Smidgen
48 Stalked prey
51 -- fixe
52 Feel sure of
53 Leafy vegetable
54 Dali colleague
55 Cousin of PDQ
56 Collapse
57 Artifact
58 "Sin City" actress
59 Observed
61 Old TV hookup



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easy

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	7	6			1			
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1			7			3		

hard

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	6				7		8	
8			9		5			4
	1		2				5	
6		5		2		4		
1		7		9				
					6	8	1	

metro.us/horoscopes

Aries Keep your thoughts to yourself until you have a surefire way of making your point heard and having it received in a beneficial way. Don't react prematurely.

Taurus Sign up for a course or retreat that will get you in touch with your inner self. Someone you encounter will offer you insight into how you can use your skills.

Gemini Look over contracts, and negotiate fairly and with a concrete strategy in mind. Don't neglect your health or your personal life. Make compromises to ensure unity.

Cancer Emotions will surface, leaving you in a precarious position. If you are too outspoken, you will bring about an unwanted altercation. Remain neutral.

Leo Get a second opinion. If you do your due diligence, you will have the foresight to make the best choice. Networking will help clarify what's going on in your industry.

Virgo Be a leader when it comes to networking, defending your beliefs and making a statement that will help shape the outcome of a situation that concerns you.

Libra Go about your business. Work on projects that allow you to use your intuitive intelligence and creative abilities. Don't give in to emotional manipulation.

Scorpio Move money around to ease financial stress, take care of any aches or pains or make physical improvements. A romantic celebration will end your day on a high note.

Sagittarius A positive change to your position, reputation or status will result if you are disciplined and determined to finish what you start. Be responsible.

Capricorn Love, romance and a new and improved lifestyle should be your top priorities. Looking back will help you make good choices moving forward.

Aquarius Establish a financial goal and map out a plan that will help you save for something special. Spend time with your children and make personal physical alterations.

Pisces Personal issues should be addressed and resolved quickly. Shopping, socializing or making plans with children will give you a different perspective on life. EUGENIA LAST

Yesterday's answers

H	O	A	R	S	E		M	P	G		G	O	A	T
A	L	L	I	E	D		A	I	R		E	R	G	O
S	E	A	S	O	N		R	O	I		N	C	A	A
			Q	U	A	N	T	U	M	L	E	A	P	S
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T	S	A	R		O	L	D		S	Y	L	V	A	N

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